

Lifestyle Medicine: Concept and Clinical Application

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Abstract

Statement of the Problem: Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) or chronic diseases cause premature mortality, morbidity, dysfunction and reduced quality of life. Although NCDs are preventable, their prevalence and incidence are increasing worldwide. The economic and social burden associated with NCDs are significant. Most important NCDs are cardiovascular diseases, cancers, respiratory diseases and diabetes, which account for over 80% of all premature NCD deaths. There are known risk factors that are strongly associated with these NCDs: unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, tobacco use and harmful use of alcohol. All these risk factors are related to daily behaviors and lifestyle. Therefore, NCDs are strongly associated with lifestyle.

Methodology: The concept of “Lifestyle Medicine” was developed to address the root causes of NCDs. Lifestyle Medicine is the use of evidence-based lifestyle therapeutic intervention – including a whole-food, plant-predominant eating pattern, regular physical activity, restorative sleep, stress management, avoidance of risky substances, and positive social connection –

as a primary modality, delivered by clinicians trained and certified in this specialty, to prevent, treat and often reverse chronic disease.

Findings: The benefits of lifestyle interventions in improving NCDs have been extensively studied in randomized controlled trials. Based on these evidence-based results, healthy lifestyle is the medicine to decrease the burden of NCDs with greatest net benefit and least potential harm. Furthermore, genetic predisposition to certain diseases has been modified with healthy lifestyle through changes in gene expression.

Conclusion and Significance: Lifestyle Medicine is a holistic approach that addresses underlying and root causes of NCDs through education, guidance and supporting positive behavior changes. It is a cost-effective tool for health promotion, which empowers individuals to determine their well-being and not to be the victims of their genes. Evidence-based Lifestyle Medicine can serve as a value-based specialty that transforms, redefines and sustains health and healthcare by treating, reversing and preventing NCDs.

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